

The Watchtower Society's Constantly Changing Doctrine: New Light or Bad Light?

Of all religious denominations which claim to be Christian, none change their doctrinal beliefs as often or as profoundly as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Jehovah's Witnesses. In a league of its own, Watchtower doctrine has undergone such radical transformation during the last 130 years, outsiders rightfully question the Society's claim to be God's only visible organization on earth, the sole spokesman for the Almighty, and His exclusive prophets assigned the task of dispensing truth to the rest of mankind.

They write: "Whom has God actually used as his prophet? Jehovah's witnesses are deeply grateful today that the plain facts show that God has been pleased to use them It has been because Jehovah thrust out his hand of power and touched their lips and put his words in their mouths." (w59 y15 pp.40-41 pars. 13-14) Elsewhere they proclaim, "As Jehovah revealed his truths by means of the first-century Christian congregation so he does today by means of the present day Christian congregation. Through this agency he is having carried out prophesying on an intensified and unparalleled scale. All this activity is not an accident. Jehovah is the one behind it all." (w64 6/15 p. 365 par 22)

The Watchtower Society has a long track record of claiming it is God who put His words into their mouths, in 1906 writing in part, "... the truths I present, as God's mouthpiece" Zion Watch Tower, July 15, 1906, 230), and "Today, Jehovah provides instruction by means of the 'faithful steward,'" (Pay Attention to Yourself and to All the Flock, 13). They also claim that "No man can properly interpret prophecy, and the Lord sends his angels to transmit correct information to his people." (Watchtower, February 15, 1936, 32). The Watchtower Society teaches that it is "... commission[ed] to speak as a 'prophet' in His name ..." (Watchtower, March 15, 1972, 189), and that they "are commission[ed] to serve as the mouthpiece and active agent of Jehovah commissioned to speak as a prophet in the name of Jehovah." The Nations Shall Know that I Am Jehovah, 55, 62. And with respect to the Watchtower Society President Joseph Franklin Rutherford's failed prophecy that in 1925 the dead would be resurrected, the Watch Tower stated, "this chronology is not of man, but of God ... the addition of more proofs removes it entirely from the realm of chance into proven certainty the chronology of present truth [is] not of human origin." (Watch Tower July 1, 1922, 217)

However, because the Jehovah's Witnesses can't make up their minds or determine with much certainty what is true and what is false, their claims to be God's exclusive prophets is dubious.

False Watchtower teachings aside - and there are many – it becomes apparent on examining Scripture that pervasive and profound changes to Watchtower theology is an unmistakeable mark of the false prophet and erroneous teachers who cannot, under any circumstances – biblical or logical – be guided by God's Holy Spirit. Watchtower alterations to doctrine and their egregious errors cannot be swept under the rug of acceptable ignorance or a harmless lack of understanding because it is Jehovah God, through the Holy Spirit – not man – who provides the requisite understanding enabling His servants and teachers and those being taught to grasp and comprehend the essential truth of the dispensed word in Scripture. Nehemiah 9:20 makes this clear: "Your good Spirit you bestowed on them to give them understanding."

To blame such errors and continuously shifting and self-contradicting doctrine on the Watchtower Society's failure to "understand" is tantamount to blaming God and His Holy Spirit for so many countless mistakes and befuddling changes of mind. To the contrary, constantly changing doctrine proves that YHWH and His Holy Spirit do not guide the Society because "the Lord's word is true forever" (Psalm 33:4; 119:142; His every word is enduring (Psalm 119:160), and reliable (Psalm

119:151). “The Lord's word in the prophet's mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:24). As Jesus said, “The Holy Spirit will teach you all things,” and his disciples “will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31). “The truth that dwells in us will be with us forever” (2 John 2).

At its core, the issue centers on the nature of truth and its accurate dispensation. God's spokesmen for God are to speak nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord (1 Kings 22:16; 2 Chronicles 18:15). It is the spirit of truth that will guide true believers into all truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). What the Jehovah's Witnesses fail to recognize is that changes to Watchtower doctrine – quite often fundamental changes to the very foundation of their religion – mean that they are frequently wrong and their teachings have been, and continue to be, false. Even if they would stumble on sound doctrine, it doesn't erase the false doctrine – it can't be true and false. Reversing course means that what once was ostensibly true is now false, and false is possibly true.

To illustrate, the Society's founder Charles Taze Russell initially taught that Jesus Christ was to be worshiped, a central belief that survived well into the 20th century but was subsequently discarded. As such, for many decades one of these beliefs was false. Little can be more important to the Christian than understanding to whom proper worship should be directed. This was no harmless mistake, and it is highly improbable that God, through the Holy Spirit, imparted this vital piece of information to his chosen teachers, for God is a God of truth (Psalms 119:160; John 17:17). The decrees, precepts and commands of the Lord are “perfect,” “trustworthy,” “right” and “clear (Psalm 19:8-10). Truth is fixed. The Lord's word “stands forever, it is firm as the heavens.” Through all generations [God's] truth endures; fixed to stand firm like the earth” (Psalm 119:89, 90 NAB).

Similarly, the Society's founder taught that the so-called Great Crowd were bound for heaven, but today Watchtower doctrine teaches that only 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses go to heaven to rule over the Great Crowd which remains on earth. This reflects a radical shift in teaching, one of which must be false, and for a very long time.

One of the most stunning reversals and flip-flops involve the many failed prophecies over the years, endless documented examples of changing from false, to false, to false, ad infinitum. The second coming of Christ was predicted to occur in 1874, and later 1914. And Armageddon was prophesied to begin in 1874, and end in 1914, and later it was changed to begin in 1914.

The point is, Watchtower doctrine has been awash in falsehood by virtue of the simple fact that two diametrically opposed teachings cannot both be the “truth,” and accordingly, one of them must be false. The same can be said for their repeated changes to the “this generation” doctrine which has undergone no less than six retractions and revisions since its inception. In referring to indications of the End Times and the second coming of the Son of Man, Jesus said, “This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (Matthew 24:34).

The Watchtower Society initially interpreted this verse to mean that those of a certain age who were alive to see the events of 1914 would never die and would live to witness Armageddon. As time went on and that generation died off, and it became painfully obvious that their prophecy was false, elaborate changes to this attractive doctrine were routinely made in order to leverage the urgency of the message. By 2010, the single generation Jesus referred to at Matthew 24:34 became two distinct overlapping generations. They changed a “1” into a “2” in order to gain much needed chronological breathing space and pushed Armageddon off into the future.

On an existential level, with life and death at stake, were earlier bans on vaccinations and organ

transplants which resulted in unnecessary death and sadness, but which are now allowed. And the long-standing ban on whole-blood transfusions (originally permitted) have been relaxed to allow the transfusion today of all the fractional components that make up blood. Stated another way, you can't bite down on a cheeseburger, but you can have your fill of the lettuce, cheese, tomato, onion, pickle, beef and the bun – if you eat them separately. The above are mere samples of numerous perplexing changes to Watchtower doctrine over the years. Many others are discussed in print publications and web sites like jwfacts.com (highly recommended).

It is precisely these kinds of teachers who not only teach falsehood, but continuously vacillate between unsound doctrine which Paul warned true believers about, referring to their teachings as waves blowing back and forth by every wind of doctrine, condemning false teachers who mislead by “every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:14). Paul was emphasizing the requirement of constancy in sound teaching, that shifting back and forth is a red flag warning to believers of the presence of false teachers who claim to speak in the name of God but who change their minds at whim, even though God does not change his mind (repent) like a man (1 Samuel 15:29).

Such constancy was also evident in the nature of Christ who did not teach that truth was both true and false. “As God is faithful, our word to you is not 'yes' and 'no.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was not 'yes' and 'no,' but 'yes' has been in him” (2 Corinthians 1:18, 19). “Paul … proclaims a profound constancy in his life and work. He grounds his defense in God himself, who is firm and reliable. Christ, Paul and the Corinthians all participate in analogous ways in the constancy of God,” (notes 2 Corinthians 1:18, 19 *NAB*). True Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) which is not “yes” and “no.”

The Watchtower's New Light doctrine is premised on Proverbs 4:18 which provides, “But the path of the just is like shining light, that grows in brilliance till perfect day (*NAB*; “which shines brighter and brighter until full day” *RSV*). But on closer inspection it is evident that the increasing light is not referring to religious doctrine, but conduct and behavior in life, the moral and ethical path of the righteous during the course of a lifetime. “Singleness of purpose and right conduct proceed from the heart of a wise man as from the source of life; they save from destruction on evil paths” (notes 4,10-27, *NAB*). The *NAB* caption for verses 10-27 is “The Good and the Evil Way,” and warns alternatingly of avoiding wicked conduct and embracing good conduct; the way or path of the just thereby becomes brighter, more clear, level and smooth (Isaiah 26:7); but the “way of the wicked is like darkness; they know not on what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19). Read logically and in proper context the increasingly brighter light of verse 18 cannot excuse doctrinal Watchtower error; it cannot allow for such numerous and profound changes to the Holy Spirit's words and the gift of God's understanding.

Neither does 1 Corinthians 13:9, 12, advance the Watchtower argument: “For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes the partial will pass away. At present we see indistinctly as in a mirror.” The topic under discussion according to the surrounding verses is the nature and enduring quality of love, and while prophesying and understanding within the human context as we know it will someday cease, love will forever remain; it shall never fail. Any knowledge that is partial or incomplete is true, not false as the Society would have you believe. Assuming progressive clarity, for the true believer this imparted knowledge is founded upon a foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:13).

It is part of the truth, but not necessarily all of it. But no one can lay a foundation, other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:10, 11). Accordingly, any partial understanding can proceed in only one direction, and that direction is always true. It cannot reverse itself, change its mind

again and again, be true and then false, and then a different false and a murky questionable truth. One direction only; no reversals, no backsliding or negation of prior so-called truth. Paul instructed Titus that he “must say what is consistent with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Not only is Watchtower doctrine unsound, it is far from consistent.

Another kind of argument espoused by the Society attempts to justify their many changes because Bible writers themselves made mistakes. First, the Society with this argument is candidly admitting that their theology has been (and continues to be) riddled with error. Secondly, they are unable to point to any mistakes made by God's biblical prophets with respect to essential doctrine and God's teachings. Did the prophets such as Daniel understand all of the information God was conveying through them? Of course not, but that is not the same as conveying God's (alleged) doctrine which later turns out to be incorrect, often by a large margin as the Society so often does. Old Testament prophets like Daniel might not have understood completely their writings, particularly future predictions, but they did not, as the Society so often does, teach that God's alleged doctrine was true, when in fact it was false at some point in time.

Third, assuming for the sake of argument that doctrinal mistakes are acceptable, the imbalance between the mountain of mistakes the Society makes and the faulty opinions of Bible writers is far out of proportion. And while Paul might have mistakenly believed the end was nearer than it actually was – a problematic interpretation of those verses at best – it was never taught as doctrine, but mere opinion. Failure to believe Paul's opinion was not a disfellowshipping offense; it did not cost anyone their lives in this life or the next.

The Jehovah's Witnesses need to invoke common sense. Is it reasonable to conclude that God revealed essential truths necessary for salvation the day before Armageddon and the Great Tribulation, two-thousand years after he instructed his disciples to begin the harvest of believers for the kingdom? Of course not.

Without realizing it, the Watchtower Society is admitting that it is preaching the word of man (Mathew 15:9) instead of the word of God despite Peter's admonishment at 1 Peter 4:11 that “whoever preaches let it be with the word of God.” All too often the Society dismisses their errors as attributable to “their” lack of understanding. But if it is their understanding, then “their” understanding which they teach is the understanding and teachings of men, not God.

As explained earlier, correct and proper understanding of truth is imparted to his servants, particularly those who teach, by God. “It is a spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding” (Job 32:8). To the preacher, Timothy, Paul wrote, “the Lord will grant you understanding in everything” (2 Timothy 2:7). Jesus opened his disciples' minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), and the Spirit of the truth will guide his disciples to all truth (John 16:13). Any claims by the Society that they exclusively have the truth, or that their teachings are the product of the Holy Spirit, is uttered in complete disregard of logic and the clear, unmistakable language of the Bible, because their errors are the product of flawed human understanding, not the Holy Spirit. The Bible does not refer to the Watchtower Society when it says, “The mouths of the just utter wisdom, their tongues speak what is right. God's teaching is in their hearts” (Psalm 37:30, 31). “The truth dwells in us, and will be with us forever” (2 John 2).

Jesus is Lord!